

**§ 58-28-40. Service of process on Secretary of State as agent for unauthorized company.**

(a) Any act of entering into a contract of insurance as an insurer or transacting insurance business in this State, as set forth in G.S. 58-28-12 by an unauthorized, foreign or alien company, shall be equivalent to and shall constitute an appointment by such company of the Secretary of State to be its true and lawful attorney upon whom may be served all lawful process in any action or proceeding against it arising out of a violation of G.S. 58-28-5, and any of said acts shall be a signification of its agreement that any such process against it, which is so served, shall be of the same legal force and validity as if in fact served upon the company.

(b) Service of process on the Secretary of State shall be made by the sheriff delivering to and leaving with the Secretary of State duplicate copies of such process, notice or demand. Service shall be deemed complete when the Secretary of State is so served. The Secretary of State shall endorse upon both copies the time of receipt and shall forthwith send one of such copies by registered mail, with return receipt requested, to such insurer at its last known principal place of business as shown on the process, notice or demand served on the Secretary of State. The Commissioner and the Attorney General shall see that such address is included on the process, notice or demand which is served upon the Secretary of State. A copy of the complaint or order of the clerk extending the time for filing the complaint must be mailed to the insurer with the copy of the summons. When a copy of the complaint is not mailed with the summons, the Secretary of State shall mail a copy of the complaint when it is served on him in the same manner as the copy of summons is required to be mailed.

(c) Upon the return to the Secretary of State of the requested return receipt showing delivery and acceptance of such registered mail, or upon the return of such registered mail showing refusal thereof by such unauthorized insurer, the Secretary of State shall note thereon the date of such return to him and shall attach either the return receipt or such refused mail including the envelope, as the case may be, to the copy of the process, notice or demand theretofore retained by him and shall mail the same to the clerk of the court in which such action or proceeding is pending and in respect of which such process, notice or demand was issued. Such mailing, in addition to the return by the sheriff, shall constitute the due return required by law. The clerk of the court shall thereupon file the same as a paper in such action or proceeding.

(d) Service made under this section shall have the same legal force and validity as if the service had been made personally in this State. The refusal of any such unauthorized insurer to accept delivery of the registered mail provided for in subsection (b) of this section or the refusal to sign the return receipt shall not affect the validity of such service; and any foreign or alien insurer refusing to accept delivery of such registered mail shall be charged with knowledge of the contents of any process, notice or demand contained therein.

(e) Whenever service of process is made upon the Secretary of State as herein provided the defendant unauthorized insurer shall have 30 days from the date when the defendant receives or refuses to accept the registered mail containing the copy of the complaint sent as in this section provided in which to appear and answer the complaint in the action or proceeding so instituted. Entries on the defendant's return receipt or the refused registered mail shall be sufficient evidence of such date. If the date of acceptance or refusal to accept the registered mail cannot be determined from the entries on the return receipt or from notations of the postal authorities on the envelope, then the date when the defendant accepted or refused to accept the registered mail shall be deemed to be the date that the return receipt or the registered mail was received back by the Secretary of State.

(f) The court in any action or proceeding in which service is made in the manner provided in the above paragraph may, in its discretion, order such postponement as may be necessary to afford such company reasonable opportunity to defend such action or proceeding.

(g) The Secretary of State shall keep a summarized record of all processes, notices and demands served upon him under this section, and shall record therein the time of such service and his action with reference thereto.

(h) Nothing herein contained shall limit or affect the right to serve any process, notice or demand to be served upon an insurer in any other manner now or hereafter permitted by law.

(i) No judgment by default shall be entered in any such action or proceeding until the expiration of 30 days from the date of the filing of the affidavit of compliance. (1967, c. 909, s. 1; 1987, c. 864, ss. 62-64; 1991, c. 720, s. 4; 2008-124, s. 3.3.)